

The Institute of Foresters of Australia

ABN 48 083 197 586



11th October, 2010

Foresters disgusted at loss of social benefits by threatened mill closure

Foresters in Western Australia today expressed their disgust at the sudden announcement by Gunns to close down their native forest operations in WA. David Wettenhall, Chairman of the Institute of Foresters of Australia WA Division said, "Gunns and the Non Government Organisations (NGOs) pushing for cessation of native forest harvesting were treating the communities and the principles of sustainable forest management with contempt."

Gunns announced last week that they would close the Dean Mill jarrah sawmill if a purchaser could not be identified within two weeks. Gunns and various NGOs have been engaged in closed door negotiations to resolve conflicts in Tasmania which have flowed through to other States without any involvement of the other communities. "It is unacceptable that NGOs and companies with particular interests in Tasmania should close down a WA industry sustainably producing renewable forest products", Mr Wettenhall said.

Management of native forests under the WA Forest Management Plan has been certified sustainable timber production under the Australian Forestry Standard. Sustainable forest management requires maintenance of socio-economic benefits as well as conservation of biodiversity, forest health and soil and water resources.

Demand for jarrah building materials and high value timbers will have to be met by imports of Indonesian Merbau, Kwila from Papua New Guinea, steel, concrete and imported CCA treated pine. It is ludicrous the Australian NGOs are trying to close down sustainable native forest industries to be replaced by non-renewable materials and imported rainforest timbers.

The presence of experienced men and equipment in the timber industry are essential fire fighting resources to protect our communities and forests.

The native forest industry is a valuable tool forest managers can use to thin drought stressed forests and maintain forest health. Much of the forest is under stress due to declining rainfall and require thinning to reduce the water requirements of the forest.

In a perverse twist, the government is expected to increase bauxite mining requiring further clearing of forests, to provide employment for displaced sawmill and logging personnel. Expanded bauxite mining is a much greater threat to the jarrah forests than the sustainable harvesting of timber.

Over 50% of the South West forests are now in National Parks and formal conservation reserves where harvesting is prohibited. There has been no old growth logging in Western Australia since 2002. Even if harvesting is reduced in the short term, areas currently State Forest and available for timber harvesting should be managed for future forest options and not be converted to formal conservation reserves.

Industry and NGOs must re-commit to maintenance of community and socio-economic benefits from forests as well as biodiversity and forest health.

The State Government, as a matter of urgency, should ensure a viable and sustainable timber industry continues in WA.

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